



Soldiers marking the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War.

AP/Wide World Photo (Nick Ut)

# Vietnam: Building and Sustaining People's Defense

By PHAM VAN TRA

In the fifteen years since the establishment of the national renewal policy, called *doi moi*, Vietnam has emerged from socioeconomic crisis characterized by extensive and debilitating rates of poverty and unemployment into a regional power experiencing double-digit economic growth, stable government, and a more powerful military.

As a sovereign state, Vietnam has a clear policy of defending the national interests, independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Fundamentally, peace and self-defense are the cornerstones.

## The National View of Defense

The policy objectives of Vietnam's national defense are to:

- safeguard peace
- maintain and develop relations of friendship, cooperation, and joint development with other countries

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Female militia marching to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the capture of Buon Ma Thuot.



AP/Wide World Photo (Richard Vogel)

- broaden national defense diplomacy to increase mutual understanding

- build confidence in relations with neighboring countries, as well as with those in Southeast Asia and the world over, regardless of sociopolitical systems.

Throughout its history, Vietnam has proven that its people are self-reliant and capable of defending their land. The national defense protects the security interests of the country and, at the same time, respects the security interests of others, sincerely wishing to be a friend to countries struggling for peace, independence, and development. The defense policy is devised on the basis of the economic, political, military, diplomatic, and humanitarian interests of the country, while considering and learning from international experience.

The national defense is one of peace and of readiness to show good will for relations with all countries worldwide, including those involved in disputes with Vietnam concerning territorial borders, islands, and the continental shelf. It contributes to the national policy of openness, diversification,

and multilateralization of external relations without aligning with one country against another, without confrontation and aggression against any country, and without joining an arms race, while still preserving the right to build forces. Vietnam puts its national security in the framework of regional security and actively contributes to overall world security. It neither joins military

alliances nor engages in military operations contrary to the spirit of safeguarding peace.

Vietnam advocates striving for the prevention and elimination of war menaces, supports nuclear-free policy, and opposes the production of weapons of mass destruction. It supports combating terrorists based on international laws and the U.N. charter.

### Building an All-People's National Defense

The all-people's national defense requires that all the people, not the armed forces alone, take part in building a national defense and protecting the country. The people have a decisive role in the all-people's national defense. Consolidating the defense of Vietnam should be closely associated with consolidating the people's security.

In building a posture of all-people's national defense as well as that of the people's security, the foremost task is to win hearts and minds and implement a national defense by the people and for the people. The basic challenge is to build defense potential in every aspect—a firm posture of all-people's security.

*Building the defense potential.* Politico-spiritual potential is one of the basic strengths of defense power. Building the politico-spiritual strength of the people implies building confidence in our political lines, in our cause of national construction and preservation, and in the renewal policies of our party.

*Building economic potential.* The techno-material foundation of the all-people's national defense is gradually built on the basis of economic

### Vietnam supports combating terrorists based on international laws and the U.N. charter





Defense Minister  
Senior General  
Pham Van Tra visiting  
the Pentagon.

AP/Wide World Photo (Evan Vucci)

## Vietnam

**Defense Budget:** \$2.2 billion for 2002; the gross domestic product in 2002 was \$34 billion (\$425 per capita).

**Manpower:** With a population of 80,048,000, Vietnam has a total of 11,281,000 men between 18 and 32 years of age. Active military strength is 484,000. Reserve forces number 3–4 million.

**Armed Forces:** Vietnam has an army of 412,000 with 1,315 main battle tanks; a navy with 42,000 sailors and two submarines and six frigates; and an air force with 30,000 personnel and 189 combat aircraft.

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 2001–2002* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2001).

development. The building of the defense industry is stressed to supply the armed forces with ever more modern equipment and techniques. Along with this, a system must be built for mobilizing the overall economy and industry in service of defense when necessary.

*Building scientific and technological potential.* The government considers science and technology, along with education and training, the priorities for national policy and the driving force of socioeconomic development. They are also the requirements for maintaining national independence and building prosperity.

To create military potential is to create a physical and spiritual power in the country in order to produce military strength and mobilize that strength in the cause of national defense. In building military potential, due attention must be

paid to creating a material foundation (defense industry and defense economy), fostering a well-grounded military intellectual standard (science of military art, military social science and humanities, military science and techniques), and perfecting the armed forces organizations (military staffing and equipment and improving the defense posture). Establishing a strong military potential should be linked to building the posture of an all-people's national defense.

The Socialist Republic of Vietnam advocates turning provinces into strong defense zones. Each zone should be self-reliant and self-resilient. Each should regularly build the whole people's aggregate strength and firmly defend the locality in the common posture of the whole country. Should war occur, such a zone will be capable of taking the initiative in fighting an enemy at the very beginning, attacking tenaciously, holding positions steadfastly, wearing away and destroying the opponent, and bogging down the enemy so it becomes passive. A zone should create opportunities and coordinate closely with national forces to gain victory.

The state sets forth tasks and objectives of defense building for each locality in its short- and long-term plans for national development. The process of implementing plans is also a process of state management in the field of national defense.

Vietnam has greatly reduced active troops in peacetime and built reserve forces for mobilization, improving the quality of militia and self-defense forces and effecting a new balance among three categories of forces.

The people's army is a component of the People's Armed Forces and is currently being built up in peacetime conditions. It has to meet the requirements of the two strategic tasks, namely to build and defend the country. The fundamental functions of the people's army are to fight for national defense, and simultaneously to mobilize the masses and to take part in national development.

The organizational structure embracing four categories of forces (the regular forces, the local forces, the militia, and self-defense forces) is the soundest system of organization, most suited to the people's war in Vietnam.

## Regular Forces

The regular forces are well trained, with high mobility and great assault and firepower involving several combined arms and services. They are organized and incorporated into strategic armies, corps, and units with effective strength and armaments, high combat readiness, and real fighting power. They are capable of waging timely combat anywhere, at any time, under all circumstances.

Marching at  
Dien Bien Phu.



AP/Wide World Photo (Richard Vogel)

The regular forces are organized into army, navy, and air force and air defense.

The army is now structured into army corps. Due to combined arms and specially trained troops, it is fully capable of fighting on diverse terrains and in different weathers across the vastness of the country. The army now has strong firepower and crack capabilities; it is quite capable of staging different types of military operations and has creative and flexible fighting patterns.

The people's navy consists of all combat and logistic elements operating in bluewater where there are islands, archipelagos, gulfs, and continental shelves, and along the coast. It is organized into many combat groups present in the various waters of Vietnam. These conditions are favorable to quick deployment, movement, and high concentration of troops to deal with critical events.

The air defense-air force plays a key role in the fight against sudden attacks and air raids. It will be further built up to the point where it can fulfill its mission to protect and control Vietnamese air space. The air force is organized into divisions and possesses aircraft of different types. It is structured in three categories of fighting forces.

### Local Forces

*The local force* is associated with specific defense zones. The structure and size of local forces

varies with the size and importance of the provinces, cities, and districts. Consisting of professional technical units, it is a mobile and full-time force existing in every locality and is a key force in a defense zone.

*The border guard force* is responsible for protecting national sovereignty and the security of the border areas, inland and over the sea, and other important targets. It is also a fighting force and is the first to be involved in counterattacks against aggressive actions.

*The militia and self-defense force* is a part time force of the masses. It is organized across the country and linked with the security protection organization to make a joint structure ensuring capabilities of both fighting and security maintenance in the locality. It is assigned to be ready to fight in its own villages, streets, offices, and production places and maintain public order and social security.

*The reserve force* is extensively organized, compatible with the theory of modern people's war. It contains all the components of regular forces. The reserve comes from various areas and from the services of the regular and local forces; thus many citizens are involved in reserve service.





AP/Wide World Photo (Richard Vogel)

Sailors at the  
Presidential Palace  
in Hanoi.

### Implementing the National Defense Policy

*Building the People's Armed Forces politically.* A political foundation serves as a basis for building strong forces in all aspects. This directly contributes to promoting combat strength on the political and ideological front of the current struggle.

*Building and training a contingent of officers and technical personnel.* The system of army schools, colleges, and institutes is an integral part of the overall system of schools, colleges, and universities of the state, and it should meet the requirements set out by the state. In training officers and technical personnel, the army and state should work together to foster a supply of talented personnel combining specialized military training with civil career training to help them gain adequate knowledge of fields such as politics, economics, culture, sociology, law, production, technology, and management.

*Maintaining, improving, and reasonably acquiring and supplementing technical equipment and weapons.* Weapons acquisition must be approached in the context of the relationship between men and weapons, the development of clever fighting patterns, the proper use of weapons, and high combat effectiveness. These factors have been studied in the development of the Vietnamese military art.

*Developing the military science.* In order to continue building and developing its military science, Vietnam must discover rules and laws of national defense for new circumstances and condi-

tions. These will be enriched with more theories of building the People's Armed Forces and maintaining national defense in peacetime. The military science will continue to develop so as to raise its own standard while keeping abreast with the pace of the world military revolution. Building the military science of Vietnam should be coupled with training and fostering military talents and enhancing the intellectuality of the defense posture and national preservation.

*Modernizing the command system.* Nowadays, in the face of great challenges posed by science and technology and by informatics warfare, the command system should be modernized to keep pace with general world standards. The war of national defense in the future will also bear the features and characteristics of informatics and hi-tech warfare. Therefore, improving and raising the quality of the communication and information system is of great importance in building up the fighting strength of the People's Armed Forces and that of the all-people's national defense.

*Building well-rounded grass-roots units.* Units should be developed with the political field as the mainstay, a contingent of officers and technical personnel as the center, and education and training as a regular duty. All this work should be associated with promoting standardization, with attending to the material and spiritual life of officers and soldiers, and with building unity within the army itself and in close relationship with the people.

*Expanding international cooperation.* In the interest of strengthening peace, and in compliance with the foreign policy of independence, sovereignty, openness, diversification, and multilateralization of external relations of the state, the national defense policy advocates establishing and promoting relations of cooperation and exchange with other countries' armed forces on the basis of equality and mutual understanding.

The People's Armed Forces are always prepared to fulfill their task of firmly safeguarding the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity and, at the same time, are willing to cooperate in issues favorable to the peace and security of the region. Moreover, they actively take part in building the country. This is a responsible attitude contributing to the peace and security of the world in general. Hopefully this introduction to the national defense policy of Vietnam will promote understanding with other defense communities. Such understanding contributes to confidence building among nations, peace, cooperation for development, and security in the region and the world over.

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**military science will develop  
to raise its own standard while  
keeping abreast with the  
world military revolution**